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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TOKYO 001541

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP AND NEA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KNNP](#) [UNSC](#) [IR](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: JAPANESE PRIME MINISTER MEETS PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD

REF: A. READE-RICHHART TELCON 6/3/08

[1](#)B. READE-EAP/J E-MAIL 6/4/08

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer for reasons X5 and X6.

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda met June 3 with Iranian President Ahmadinejad in Rome on the margins of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) summit meeting. In the fifty-minute pull-aside, which was requested by the Iranians, PM Fukuda told Ahmadinejad that the perpetuation of Iran's nuclear program made it difficult for Iran and Japan to maintain a "normal" relationship, and that Ahmadinejad should make the "bold decision" to cease its uranium enrichment activities and comply with the will of the international community, as expressed through U.N. Security Council resolutions. Only then, he said, would the window for international cooperation with Iran be opened. Ahmadinejad reportedly replied "why should I" and proposed forming an international committee with Japan to work toward the abolition of all nuclear weapons. He told Fukuda he realized the Japanese people are nervous about nuclear weapons, but said their irritation should be directed at the one country that has used them, not at Iran. Fukuda also thanked Ahmadinejad for Iran's help in trying to secure the release of a Japanese student kidnapped near Bam last October. Ahmadinejad said Iran will try to help, but added the current situation is not Iran's fault, stating that the kidnappers are secure in a third country that is occupied by foreign forces, implying Afghanistan. The meeting between the two leaders was the first at this level in eight years. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) MOFA Second Middle East Division Principal Deputy Director Motosada Matano contacted Embassy the evening of June 3 to advise that Prime Minister Fukuda had agreed to meet with Iranian President Ahmadinejad on the margins of the FAO summit in Rome, and that the "pull-aside" would begin within an hour and was scheduled to last for 20 minutes. He promised to call back with a readout once the meeting had concluded. He told Political Officer that Japan felt compelled to accept the Iranian request for the meeting in order to thank Iran for its assistance in attempting to win the release of a kidnapped Japanese citizen, and to advise Iran at the highest level that it should comply with the will of the international community and cease its uranium enrichment program. Several hours later, Matano called back and provided a brief readout of the meeting, based on a telephone discussion with the Prime Minister's party. He said the meeting started late and had lasted approximately 50 minutes. His readout was communicated to EAP/J (refs). On June 4, Political Officer met with MOFA Second Middle East

Division Iran Unit Chief Takashi Kamada, who briefed him on the meeting, reading directly from a reporting cable he had received.

IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM

13. (C) According to Kamada, PM Fukuda began the meeting by stating that apart from the ongoing petroleum supply relationship between Japan and Iran, the bilateral relationship cannot be considered "normal" as long as Iran pursues its nuclear and missile development programs. He informed Ahmadinejad that the Japanese people are very nervous about and opposed to nuclear weapons, and highlighted the importance for all countries, including Iran, of maintaining good relations within the international community. He requested that Iran take seriously the four resolutions that have been enacted by the Security Council and underlined how important it is for Iran to accept the requirements of the international community, as clearly expressed in the resolutions. Fukuda said he was very well aware of Iran's position on the issue of its nuclear program but emphasized the importance to Iran of maintaining good relations with the rest of the international community.

14. (C) The Prime Minister continued by noting he understands Iran is concerned about the fact that its oil resources are limited, and that is why Tehran believes it necessary to develop a peaceful civilian nuclear program. He then noted that Japan has the world's best energy-saving technologies

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which are also good for the environment, and suggested that if Japan and Iran can cooperate in this field, Iran would have no need to develop a nuclear power program.

15. (C) President Ahmadinejad replied by stating this is a "sovereignty" issue and that good international relations must be based on justice. He said he can understand why Japan is concerned about nuclear weapons and sympathizes with Japan on this, but if this is the case, he said, Japan should direct its attention and irritation not to Iran but to the countries that possess nuclear weapons, particularly the one that has used them against Japan. Ahmadinejad asserted to Fukuda that Iran is complying with all IAEA regulations, and that he believes nuclear weapons are inefficient and wasteful. "Even if we had them, they can't be used," he stated.

16. (C) With regard to Iran's relations with Japan, Ahmadinejad said that many other Asian and European countries are anxious to improve commercial relations with Iran, but that Tehran is waiting for Japan first, given the good history of its relationship. He said it is important to respect this long-standing relationship, and that Japan should increase its economic relations with Iran.

17. (C) Fukuda replied that he was glad to hear Ahmadinejad's "good statement" that he does not think nuclear weapons have any utility in maintaining security, agreeing that nuclear weapons are very expensive and are unusable. Pursuing a nuclear program, Fukuda told Ahmadinejad, presents a huge financial burden that hurts national finances. Fukuda then said he had only one request of Ahmadinejad: given that the international community is seriously concerned with Iran's nuclear enrichment activities, he asked that Ahmadinejad make the "bold decision" to suspend these activities.

18. (C) Ahmadinejad said this would be "impossible." "I cannot do this. Why should I?" He said Iran has proposed that countries that possess nuclear weapons should disarm and suggested that Iran and Japan could work together to advance this initiative. Fukuda replied that he had listened to Ahmadinejad's position, and reminded him that Japan is a pacifist country that does not seek confrontations with any

other countries. Ahmadinejad rejoined that Iran, too, is not hostile to any other country except for those who interfere with Iran's affairs. Fukuda then concluded this discussion by stating that once Iran complies with the will of the international community by abiding by the Security Council resolutions and ceasing its enrichment activities, the window for international cooperation with Iran will be opened, and Japan will be able to provide technology and investment. Ahmadinejad replied that Iran has made a new proposal on the nuclear dispute, but did not make any further comments.

KIDNAPPED JAPANESE CITIZEN

¶9. (C) The other topic discussed in the meeting, reported both Matano and Kamada, was the fate of a Japanese student kidnapped last October near the Iranian city of Bam. Fukuda thanked Iran for the efforts it is making to secure his release, and asked Ahmadinejad to continue to take all possible steps to return him safely to his family. Ahmadinejad replied he was aware of the case and said Iran is doing everything it can, but no one should consider this situation to be Iran's fault, as the student was being held in a "neighboring country that is occupied by foreign forces." Matano said the Japanese took this to mean Afghanistan, even though most reports indicate the gang that is holding the hostage is located in Pakistan.

MEETING PARTICIPANTS

¶10. (C) Kamada confirmed that the meeting lasted approximately 50 minutes. Ahmadinejad was accompanied by Foreign Minister Motaki and another official who was not identified. In addition to PM Fukuda, the Japanese participants were Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Affairs Masaharu Kohno, MOFA Middle Eastern and African

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Affairs Bureau Deputy Director General Shigeo Matsutomi (who provided the first telephonic readout to Matano), and Assistant Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiroyasu Ando. Following the meeting, the Japanese provided a press briefing to the media which closely tracks with the readout we received. Both Kamada and Matano underlined the fact that Fukuda was very sensitive to the presence of photographers and journalists. All photographers, including the official photographers, were banned from the meeting in order to assure the two leaders were not pictured together.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) The Japanese have consistently sought to advise the Iranians at senior levels "on a friendly basis" that they must maintain good relations with the rest of the international community, and that the first step in doing so is to comply with the Security Council resolutions. They viewed the meeting with Ahmadinejad as an opportunity to deliver this message at the highest level, and noted this would be the first time Ahmadinejad would hear directly from the leader of a "western" country on this issue. In addition, the Japanese believed it necessary to further encourage the Iranians to help win the freedom of their kidnapped citizen.

¶12. (C) Kamada told us that Japan's strategy on Iran is the "carrot approach." For that reason, Fukuda complemented Ahmadinejad's "good statement" that he did not believe in the utility of nuclear weapons, even though it is not possible to know whether the Iranian is being honest when he says this. Similarly, Japan knows that Iran is hungry for Japanese investment and technology. Accordingly, Tokyo is offering to

enhance the economic relationship once the "window for cooperation" is opened following Iranian compliance with the resolutions.

¶13. (C) Both Matano and Kamada said that Ahmadinejad's language was much more "frank and forthcoming" than the more nuanced and measured words the Japanese often hear from Iranian diplomats, particularly with regard to the United States. Although he never explicitly mentioned the U.S., Ahmadinejad's reference to the country that has used nuclear weapons against Japan and the "foreign forces" occupying the neighboring country were unmistakable swipes at the United States. In fact, Kamada believes Ahmadinejad's implicit reference to Afghanistan was simply an opportunity to get in a dig, given the fact that most intelligence the Japanese have indicates their kidnapped citizen is being held in Pakistan, not Afghanistan.

SCHIEFFER